

INFOTECH

# Stop PowerPoint Paranoia: Thinking Differently about Presentation Projects

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**A** presenter's enthusiasm will be contagious if he/she combines a meaningful mission with engaging examples and opportunities to extend the experience.

Whether learners use PowerPoint or Google Presentations, it's time to re-imagine student assignments and assessments. Identifying a meaningful mission, infusing engaging examples, and offering opportunities to participate and extend the experience through technology-rich resources are critical to project pizzazz. Eliminate the common problems that poison presentations and turns off the audience. Instead, make your projects pop! See Figure 1.

PowerPoint can be seductive. Young people and teachers alike are susceptible to its charms. Small groups can be heard saying:

- Let's do a PowerPoint presentation!
- Let's animate the clip art.
- Let's add a few bullet points.
- How about some crashing glass?

Rarely do we hear students or educators talk about the purpose of the presentation, the quality of the information presented, or opportunities to extend the experience beyond the presentation. These are the elements that make a presentation powerful, not superfluous clipart, dizzying transitions, or annoying sounds.

In the past, presentations often displayed factual, content information as a series of bullet points. Eliminate the laundry lists. Increasingly, savvy presenters are shifting their attention from disseminating facts to designing experiences that address the diverse needs of their audience and stimulate their thoughts and insights, while using varied channels of communication to convey ideas.

Rather than exploring the tools like PowerPoint, this article will examine how to think differently about presenting ideas, rep-

resenting ideas, and extending the experience. For instance, thinking about the structure of humans and animals through the use of X-ray images. See Figure 2. Go to X-Ray Visions [ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/10/photo-journal/veasey-photography](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/10/photo-journal/veasey-photography) by Nick Veasey from National Geographic for other examples.

## MEANINGFUL MISSION

A meaningful mission is at the core of an effective presentation.

*Not... "I want to tell you stuff about this topic so you know stuff".*

*Instead... "I want to challenge your thinking about this topic".*

For instance, you may have heard of the chrysalis stage of a Monarch butterfly, but did you know other insects have a similar pupa stage? For the mosquito, it's called a tumbler. By showing a photograph of a mosquito tumbler next to a monarch chrysalis, audiences have a unique example for comparison of this stage.

As you re-design your student project assignment, think about the purpose of the presentation. How will student designers involve their audience in the inquiry process including questioning, thinking, inferring, and reflecting?

## Inquiry and the Mission

Consider the follow four stages of inquiry:

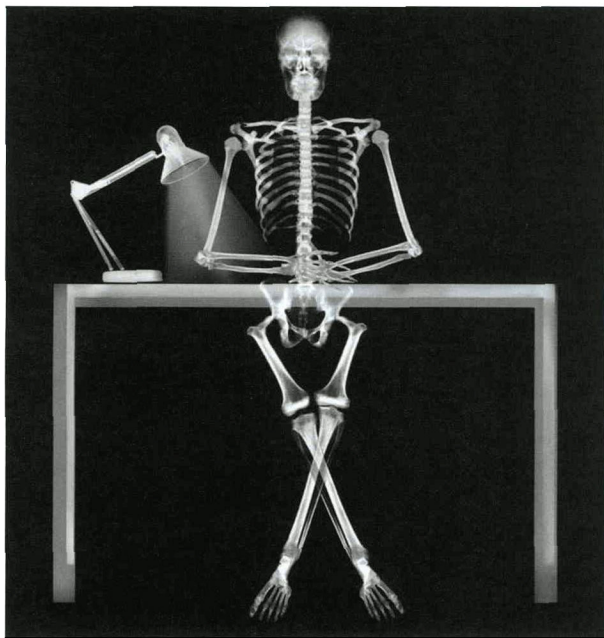
**QUESTION.** Encourage the audience to generate and think about questions. For instance, providing relevant data or statistics encourages questioning. Rather than simply showing an infographic, ask viewers what questions they have after examining a visual. Use a graphic related to the Internet Infographic [zavose.com/infographics/the-internet-infographic](http://zavose.com/infographics/the-internet-infographic) as an example for generating questions.

For more examples of infographics, read Joanne Troutner's article titled "Infographics Defined" in the December 2010 issue of *Teacher Librarian*.

**THINK.** Promote deep thinking during the presentation. In a project about world cultures, show the homes of children from around the globe. Ask the audience to compare them to their own home. Use the following website: [Homes Around the World](http://HomesAroundtheWorld.com) ( [www.ict.mic.ul.ie/websites/2002/Imelda\\_Fitzgerald/HomesAroundtheWorld-1.htm](http://www.ict.mic.ul.ie/websites/2002/Imelda_Fitzgerald/HomesAroundtheWorld-1.htm) ), [Houses Around the World](http://HousesAroundtheWorld.com) ( [www.hgphoto/wfwest/house/house-e.html](http://www.hgphoto/wfwest/house/house-e.html) ), [Wonderful Houses Around the World](http://WonderfulHousesAroundtheWorld.com) ( [www.shelterpub.com/\\_wonderful\\_houses/wh-toc.html](http://www.shelterpub.com/_wonderful_houses/wh-toc.html) ) or go to [Wikimedia Commons](http://WikimediaCommons.org/wiki/Houses) ( [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Houses](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Houses) ) and explore by type or country. Also, use the book [Material World](http://MaterialWorld.com) ( [books.google.com/books?id=NGQ7Ng2MDLIC](http://books.google.com/books?id=NGQ7Ng2MDLIC) ), listen to the NPR program, and explore [Material World](http://MaterialWorld.com) ( [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/worldbalance/material.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/worldbalance/material.html) ) from PBS NOVA for ideas. Also, consider the book [Where Children Sleep](http://WhereChildrenSleep.com) by James Mollison.

**INFER.** Show participants examples and ask them to draw inferences. For instance, what makes Olympic swimmers different from other swimmers?

**REFLECT.** Reflect on primary source documents, speeches, and



**Figure 2: X-Ray**

landmark decisions. We've all read the Gettysburg address, but what does it mean to you. What visuals would represent your thinking about the speech? Watch the project posted on YouTube ( [youtube.com/watch?v=FsrDeGJUzdQ](http://youtube.com/watch?v=FsrDeGJUzdQ) ) to begin this type of discussion.

### **Content and the Mission**

When selecting content, presentation developers should consider the spectrum of purposes. Is the presentation intended to entertain, emote, inform, instruct, challenge, engage, provoke or persuade? A diagram of a hand might be used to inform, while an image of a sick child might be used to persuade. What type of approach best fits your mission?

**ENTERTAIN.** Cartoons are a good way to draw attention to a topic and entertain at the same time.

**EMOTE.** When exploring a topic, look for information or ideas that will connect

with people at an emotional level. For example, rather than a traditional view of animals. Think about their relationships. Use the *Animal Sweethearts* photos ( [kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/photos/animal-sweethearts/](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/photos/animal-sweethearts/) ). For more ideas, view the *Animal Courtship Infographic* ( [www.sun-sentinel.com/broadband/theedge/newsillustrated/sfl-edge-ni-animal-courtship-0,3602483.htmlpage](http://www.sun-sentinel.com/broadband/theedge/newsillustrated/sfl-edge-ni-animal-courtship-0,3602483.htmlpage) ).

**INFORM.** When exploring the human hand, consider the best way to visualize the parts for discussion. It might be a photograph, line drawing, or diagram.

**INSTRUCT.** Use images and video as part of a presentation to demonstrate an idea or teach a concept. Watch *Instructable* ( [www.instructables.com](http://www.instructables.com) ) videos for ideas. Many are YouTube videos that you may need to download for class. Use *Zamzar* ( [www.zamzar.com/](http://www.zamzar.com/) ) or other online tools to download, then insert into presentations. Be sure to give credit in the presentation.

**CHALLENGE.** Who owns the Arctic? Use

the *Arctic Circle Infographic* ( [www.sun-sentinel.com/broadband/theedge/newsillustrated/sfl-ni-arctic-0,5060630.html-story](http://www.sun-sentinel.com/broadband/theedge/newsillustrated/sfl-ni-arctic-0,5060630.html-story) ) to examine the issue and challenge conventional thinking.

**ENGAGE.** When you imagine microscopic beings, you might not think about them as living things with daily lives. Use photographs to bring them to life.

**PROVOKE.** Use video as a way to provoke people to think in different ways about a topic. For instance, explore the videos at *Truth* ( [www.thetruth.com/videos/](http://www.thetruth.com/videos/) ).

**PERSUADE.** Combine images with statistics for a powerful statement. Use image collections from government sources such as the Center for Disease Control ( <http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp> ) to discuss health research topics such as small pox or malaria.

As you collaborate with teachers to develop assignments, select content that matches the mission. Do you want participants to simply enjoy or take action? Select a word that could provide focus for a student presentation assignment. What type of assessment could you use to evaluate this type of assignment?

## **ENGAGING EXAMPLES**

Engaging examples add life to a presentation.

*Not... "I'll show you things you've already seen or heard before".*

*Instead... "I want you to see and think in new and exciting ways".*

We often explore history through famous people such as presidents. However it's interesting to learn about everyday people too. Use family photos to bring history alive. My great grandfathers played on the same football team in high school around the turn of the last century. Lynk Thomas is in the front row on the extreme right and Paul Kinick is sitting beside him. What would they have thought of the president of the United States at the time? See Figure 3.

### **Compelling Examples**

Rather than simply copying images off the Internet, encourage students to use engaging examples including stories, experienc-





**Figure 3: Family Photograph**

es, anecdotes, and varied resources. Students should be asking the question: how will I bring the topic alive with my ideas?

**STORIES.** Draw human interest through stories that make the content of the presentation more interesting and connected. This is particularly important in projects focusing on biographies. For instance, by 1951 Albert Einstein was famous. However, he was just a person like everyone else. He was known for his unruly hair and sense of humor. Find photos that could illustrate this story at Wikimedia Commons ( [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Albert\\_Einstein](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Albert_Einstein) ).

**EXPERIENCES.** You can't take your audience on an African safari to explore the habitat of the zebra. However you could describe the habitat within the context on a panorama image. Go to Gigapan ( [gigapan.org/](http://gigapan.org/) ) and 360Cities ( [www.360cities.net/](http://www.360cities.net/) ) for many examples.

**ANECDOTES.** Rather than just providing factual information, incorporate stories to personalize information and provide a context. For instance, if you're talking about the use of animals in medicine and therapy, locate an example to illustrate the concept such as Tater Tot ( [kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/photos/gallery/tater-tot/](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/photos/gallery/tater-tot/) ) the miniature horse.

**RESOURCES.** Rather than simply showing a single image, incorporate a wide range of resources to explain a topic including books, illustrations, educational materials, and Google Video as shown in Figure 4.

### Types of Examples

Ask students to think about what type of examples best fit their mission? Will the presentation contain known, familiar, comforting, connected, modified, different, atypical, or unique examples to convey ideas and information?

**KNOWN.** Talk about how well-known sounds and images reflect a particular topic or time period such as Dorothea Lange's Migrant Woman photograph.

**FAMILIAR.** Use moonwalk photographs from NASA Images ( [www.nasaimages.org](http://www.nasaimages.org) ) to connect an audience with the topic of space and remind them of our past visits to the moon. Explore the composition of the moon plus identify five reasons we should return.

**COMFORTING.** Use audio to reflect a place or time. For instance, "This Land Is Your Land" is a folk song that could be used in exploring the regions of the US. The picture book "This Land Is Your Land" has great images to go with the song.

**CONNECTED.** Use classic photographs like the image of an Afghan girl by Steve McCurry from National Geographic that can be found at the Famous Photo ( [www.worldsfamousphotos.com](http://www.worldsfamousphotos.com) ) website. People around the world associate this photo with Afghan women.

**MODIFIED.** Rather than using all of the statistics, let's think about 100 people. Watch the video Miniature Earth ( [www.miniature-earth.com/](http://www.miniature-earth.com/) ). Incorporate elements of the book "If America Were a Village". There's also an infographic that represents the Earth's population through 100 People ( [www.toby-ng.com/graphic-design/the-world-of-100/](http://www.toby-ng.com/graphic-design/the-world-of-100/) ).

**DIFFERENT.** When students explore cultures different from their own, images are essential. Ask students to examine how people around the world celebrate happy events. For instance a person from India might participate in the 5,000 year-old tradition of



**Figure 4: The Snail Project**

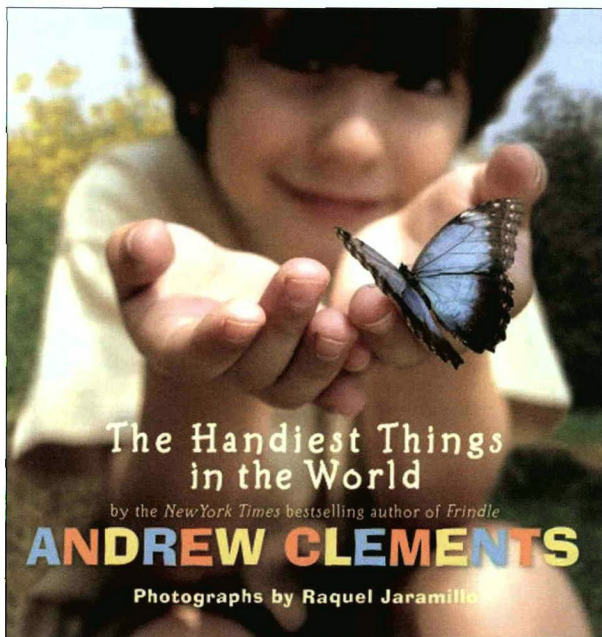


Figure 5a, 5b, 5c: The Handiest Things in the World Activity

henna hand designs. National Geographic's People & Culture photo gallery ( [photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day/people-culture/](http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day/people-culture/) ) provides images that explore interesting and different cultural experiences.

**ATYPICAL.** Highlight the lesser-known aspects of history. For instance in the 1960s, Jerri Cobb trained but never made a trip into space. We often focus on the famous and infamous people from history, however the less well-known individuals are often as interesting to study.

**UNIQUE.** When studying buildings, sculpture, or other famous constructions, we often see the final or finished assembly. However, look for unique images that the audience may not have seen before. For example, explore the Eiffel Tower ( [www.crookedbrains.net/2008/02/under-construction.html](http://www.crookedbrains.net/2008/02/under-construction.html) ).

As you think about the possibilities for student projects, do you want learners to think "in the box" or "around the edges"? Select a word that could spark interest or provide focus for one of your lessons or presentations.

## ORGANIZED OPPORTUNITIES

Student presentations are often limited to five or ten minutes. Consider ways to extend the experience by offering options that go beyond the primary presentations materials. If students are using a presentation to promote their favorite Michael L. Printz Award winning book for young adults, ask them to also set up an online book discussion using a tool such as Good Reads ( [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com) ). Or, encourage participants to view an author's website such as the 2011 Printz award winner, Paolo Bacigalupi's *Windupstories* ( [windupstories.com](http://windupstories.com) )

*Not... "When I'm done, you can ask questions I can't answer".*

*Instead... "I want to involve you and extend the learning experience".*

If you're using a document camera to share a book such as "The Handiest Things in the World" by Andrew Clements, think of ways to extend the experience by providing a camera and asking children to



photograph their own hands. Students can then participate in creating a class presentation of their photographs. See Figure 5.

## Audience Involvement

Students should ask themselves: how will I involve my audience? Organized opportunities to participate and extend the presentation experience include connecting to an online version of the presentation materials, sharing additional resources, participating in online discussions associated with the topic, or providing options for participants to take action. Extend their learning far beyond the scope of the presentation.

**CONNECT.** Help participants associate the topic with their own life. For instance, you might provide calculators and other online tools. Life expectancy calculators are an example that might be used when talking about healthy habits: Life Expectancy Calculator ( [moneycentral.msn.com/investor/calcs/n\\_expect/main.asp](http://moneycentral.msn.com/investor/calcs/n_expect/main.asp) ), Living to 100 ( [calculator.livingto100.com/calculator](http://calculator.livingto100.com/calculator) ), The Longevity Game ( [northwesternmutual.com/learning-center/the-longevity-game.aspx](http://northwesternmutual.com/learning-center/the-longevity-game.aspx) ), Virtual Age ( [peterussell.com/Odds/VirtualAge.php](http://peterussell.com/Odds/VirtualAge.php) ). Also explore the Living Longer Interactive ( [msnbc.msn.com/id/23887587](http://msnbc.msn.com/id/23887587) ).

**EXTEND.** Provide resources that allow participants to learn more about the experience. For instance after talking about the Inca civilization, ask participants to explore the GigaPan ( [gigapan.org/gigapans/1758/](http://gigapan.org/gigapans/1758/) ) image of Machu Picchu. Then, go to the Google Earth Machu Picchu Tour ( [gigapan.org/gigapans/1758.kml](http://gigapan.org/gigapans/1758.kml) ).

**SHARE.** Create a place where audience participants can discuss the topic beyond the scope of the presentation. The Ning ( [ning.com](http://ning.com) ) website provides a place where teachers can create a social network for their peers or students. It's free to educators. Explore the Technology and School Administration Ning ( [schooladministration.ning.com](http://schooladministration.ning.com) ).

**TAKE ACTION.** After talking about the importance of nutrition, a presenter might recommend writing a grant such as the Welch's Harvest Grants ( [scholastic.com/harvest/](http://scholastic.com/harvest/) ) project.

## Presentation Participation

Think about ways students can use technology to involve their audiences before, during, and after the presentation. They should ask themselves: what types of opportunities best match my audience and

need? Select technology-rich tools and resources to promote interaction and collaboration. Is the presentation intended to be the end or the beginning of a larger experience?

**BEFORE.** Create a poll using Flisti ( [flisti.com](http://flisti.com) ) or ask participants to text their ideas or thoughts going into the presentation.

**DURING.** Set up a backchannel using a tool such as Todaysmeet ( [todaysmeet.com](http://todaysmeet.com) ) that can be used for sharing ideas during a presentation. For instance if you're doing a program on book clubs, you could set up a Todaysmeet Bookclubs ( [todaysmeet.com/bookclubs](http://todaysmeet.com/bookclubs) ).

**AFTER.** Use Wallwisher ( [www.wallwisher.com](http://www.wallwisher.com) ) to share ideas or complete an activity after a presentation. For example, participants could share ideas about ways to recycle or experiment for the science fair.

## TECHNOLOGY, PRESENTATIONS, AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

From elaborate social networks to vivid virtual worlds, tomorrow's presenters will have increasingly sophisticated technologies available for communicating ideas. However the key to an effective presentation will continue to be how these tools are applied to meet the needs of learners. How will you use technology to help students make the most out of a presentation project?

The next time a teacher talks about their end-of-semester PowerPoint assignment, encourage a new assignment that focuses on content connections, information inquiry, and thinking experiences rather than simply making PowerPoint slides.

## RESOURCES

Troutner, Joanne (December 2010). *Info-Graphics defined*, Teacher Librarian, 38(2), 44-47.

*Adapted from the presentation Presentations that Pop! Stop PowerPoint Paranoia at ( [eduscapes.com/sessions/pop/](http://eduscapes.com/sessions/pop/) ).*



Figure 6: Welch's Harvest Grants.